

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown Project

South High School

O. H. 343

FRED BEEDE

Interviewed

by

Bernice Mercer

on

November 5, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: FRED BEEDE

INTERVIEWER: BERNICE MERCER

SUBJECT: Mechanical Drawing, Students, Teachers, Education

DATE: November 5, 1975

M: This is an interview with Mr. Fred Beede for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the History of South High School by Bernice Mercer on November, 1975, at 2:30 p.m.

The first thing that we really want to try to do a lot with is your home and your early schooling. We feel that this is quite an important part of the history. Would you care to just go ahead on this?

B: Youngstown is my home; I was born here. My early schooling for the first year was the old, Hillman Street School, which is now torn down. It was located on Hillman Street between Falls and Hillman. At that time, after the first year, a new school was constructed further out on Delason Avenue, called the Delason Avenue School, which is now torn down. I went there for several years.

M: Those buildings, what were they like? Were they similar to the later school buildings in structure?

B: Hillman Street School was of the old-type brick buildings. It was a two-floor building. A number of schools in Youngstown were built then.

Later, Delason Avenue School was built. It was a three story building with an auditorium up on the third floor, which we used for assemblies or plays or things of that type. There were no classrooms, as I remember, up on the third floor; there was just an auditorium. I went there for several years until another new school was built, Myrtle Avenue School down on Myrtle Avenue where

the Hillman Junior High is now located. I forget now exactly what year that was built, but I continued my elementary education there through the eighth grade.

M: As you remember these early schools, what sort of feelings do you have about your school and your teachers and your general school experience?

B: I suppose it was normal with most youngsters of that age.

M: Did most children enjoy school?

B: I think so. It was the thing to do, and everybody had a good time. I don't remember any particular disciplinary problems that we ran into like we sometimes hear about now.

M: Were there several rooms for one grade?

B: Yes.

M: And it was strictly graded at the time?

B: That's right. I don't remember the organization of Hillman Street School, but in both Delason and Myrtle Avenue School there was either one or two sections of each grade.

M: The downtown section was almost as well populated as it is right now.

B: The south side was growing rapidly at this time. It was really booming. They thought by building out on Delason Avenue they would build it far enough out to take care of it, but then they had to build halfway between Hillman and Delason.

M: That tells that story--the fact that they were misled about how fast the area would grow.

B: They were not only expanding out, but within the area there were more families building.

M: I also wanted to ask at this point about your father and mother. I remember that your father had these telescopes later on, and I was interested in him. I always wondered how he started making the telescopes.

B: His interest in star gazing and telescope making started very young when he was a boy in school. I think he attended the Oak Street School on the east side. The principal of the school was quite interested in astronomy.

- M: Did he ever talk about this man or his name? Do you know the man's name?
- B: I can get it; I don't know what it is. In fact, it is written up in Howard Allie's new book that is coming out next week on the history of Mahoning County.
- M: I didn't know he was writing, although I knew he had written a lot in the past for school books.
- B: It's a six hundred page history of Mahoning County. It's being bound now in Cleveland. He has a wealth of information. He would help out quite a lot, I think.
- M: Back to your dad and how he got to making the telescopes.
- B: He used most any lens grinder or mirror grinder. They generally start very small with a small six inch diameter disc of glass and generally by their reading on previous works they learn how to grind this glass so it takes on a spherical shape. Then they polish the surface so that it reflects. Then they further polish it so that it gets in a parabolic shape so that it reflects the range of planets and stars into one point. At that point they view the heavens.
- M: I didn't realize that he ground the lenses as well. He made the tube too, didn't he?
- B: Yes.
- M: What was his occupation?
- B: He was a plumber. He did the whole works. Later on in life, when some of the telescopes were made, he had other men working with him and they made what they called the mounting. Earlier he did the whole thing, all the work to the mounting and the lenses and everything.
- M: You must have heard some things about this as you were growing up?
- B: It was part of the life of the family. Every night we knew that he would be out in the backyard there looking through the telescope on a clear night to see what he could find.
- M: All through his life he had this?
- B: That's right. Right up until the night before he took to the hospital with his stroke he was still working on polishing mirrors, always with the idea of finding a better way of doing it. He never felt that he had reached

perfection, but he knew that he was at the top of the list.

None of us, I or my brothers, took an active interest or following of this.

M: No, but it was still . . .

B: It was his hobby.

M: You would have gotten respect for that area of learning because of his interest. It would give you some interest whether you followed it as your own avocation or not.

I don't know about all of your brothers; I knew about the one that was in Youngstown as the coach for so many years.

B: My oldest brother, Harry, became a plumber, learned his trade, and went in with Dad in the plumbing business. My next brother, Ralph, who was two years older than I, started in plumbing for a while and then went into other kinds of work. He was in a variety of different jobs. His last job, I think, was a sales advisor for an automobile company, the Henderson-Overland Company. He had a phonograph shop for a while; he was quite a salesman. He enjoyed painting and sketching. Somewhere along the line there, through his sketching and drawing of portraits and things of that type, he became interested in anatomy. He had not gone to high school so he felt that he wanted to study medicine. Then he went to night school to finish up his high school education. He then went on to Ohio State University and got his degree in medicine.

M: That's wonderful. At that time that wasn't a very common thing. People thought they couldn't do that sort of thing at that time.

B: He had a difficult time getting into the school of medicine because he was a much older man at the time, and the policy of a medical school was that a graduate should have quite a few years left to practice medicine. This would come down quite a bit on the number of years that would be available.

M: But he was persistent and got this accomplished?

B: That's right. He died a number of years ago. Then, of course, the younger brother, Dike, went on to college. He was interested in sports mainly.

M: There is such a diversity of interest all through the family, except the two educators. You weren't the youngest?

B: No, I had a younger sister. After graduating from South High, she went into secretarial work for a while and then went to Missouri and went to the Central Bible Institute in Springfield, Missouri. That's the Assembly of God school there. Then after finishing there she worked in a gospel publishing house, and finally was married there to the manager of the publishing house.

M: South High is really quite an old school. It hasn't been remodeled too much. Has it been added to a great deal?

B: In the early days it wasn't . . .

M: Was it removed and made over?

B: No. I forget the exact year that the contract was let. It was about 1908.

M: The second high school in Youngstown?

B: Yes. That was, of course, just a big field at the time, a big field that sloped down. It was sort of like a ravine that went from Market Street down east. The ravine was quite deep in back of what is now Garfield School. When the school was built, the front part of the school was built up the full height and the back wings were only built up just one floor high to contain some of the shop classes and some other classrooms. The gymnasium was built in the center part and then later on the wings were built up to the third floor.

Then in about 1921 a very large addition was put on the northeast end of the building. I suppose it added about fifty percent to the size of the building when they put that on. At that time, of course, there were still just two high schools, but Youngstown was growing rapidly and even that addition within a short time couldn't take care of the population.

M: Your distance from school wasn't very great.

B: I think it was just less than a mile from South High.

M: How far did some people walk, or was there such a thing as a bus?

B: They came in streetcars, of course. We took in the entire west side, clear up Mahoning Avenue. They all had to come downtown and transfer and come up Market Street. Most everybody on the south side walked. Some on the south side that were out and couldn't use the Park and

Falls line did come in on the streetcar there. Very few of them that lived on the south side used the streetcar.

M: The population must have gone up amazingly rapidly, didn't it, after it was built?

B: I came in to teach mechanical drawing there at South High in the fall of 1919. It was growing quite rapidly then, because just about a year after I came, South High went on half-day sessions. This was strictly half-day sessions, one group in the morning and one group in the afternoon. I had a schedule starting at 12:30 in the afternoon teaching until 5:00. Another group of teachers came in in the morning early and taught till 12:30. There were entirely different groups of students in the morning than in the afternoon.

M: Just double the capacity?

B: Yes.

M: Would you give us some idea of what it was like in South High during the time that you were in high school? What do you remember sort of outstanding about the high school, things that impressed you and probably had something to do with your occupation?

B: I think it took me a little while to realize this as a student, but after I was there for a year or so I realized that we had an excellent crop of teachers. The teachers that were selected for South High were the best in their field that could be obtained anyplace in the United States.

M: Do you remember some of their names?

B: Some of the early teachers were moved over from Rayen. One of the outstanding teachers over there was Chatterman, he taught me in Latin. Another teacher was Mr. Jones, who came from Rayen; he taught me in algebra, and later on the woman from Meadville, Miss Jean Fry, taught me in algebra. They were all experts. The English teachers, I probably had different English teachers each year. I don't think I had what you would call a weak teacher my entire four years at South High. They were all tops. I think that's the thing that I remember most as far as the schooling is concerned.

M: Then when you were ready for college did you go to Youngstown University or Youngstown College?

B: There was no college in Youngstown at that time.

M: Not at all?

B: No.

M: The YMCA, that hadn't even started?

B: That hadn't started at all. Everybody that went to college went out of the city. I went to Carnegie Tech at that time to take up industrial education.

M: I was wondering about this mechanical drawing, is that what you taught?

B: Yes, mechanical drawing.

M: Then we've skipped the war time.

B: During my schooling at Carnegie, of course, World War I started. At the end of my junior year at Carnegie, I enlisted in the Army. This was in 1918. I think I enlisted about June first, and finally went into officers' training school. During my schooling in officers' training school the war ended so I was back home again by the last of November. I had a very short . . . in fact, just about exactly six months in the service.

M: During that time this flu epidemic affected the Army camps and all, too, didn't it?

B: Yes. I was down at Fort Monroe in Virginia when the flu hit. We all battled the flu there in the Army camps. Every morning we would see a big group going to the hospital to get checked and treated and so forth. Most of us slept out on the porches of the barracks there to try to get as much fresh air as we could.

M: About the flu epidemic at South High, there are young people that are amazed, trying to picture what this would be like, using South High for a hospital.

B: I don't have a good picture of that because I was fortunate enough to get back into school at Carnegie.

M: So you really weren't here during that period at all?

B: No, I got back in January of the following year.

M: But your brothers told you about it?

B: My brother, Dike, yes. There were quite a number in Youngstown who did live through that flu epidemic at South, and had helped in the hospital there. I suppose you could find one or two that have had that experience that would be glad to tell you about it.

- M: So many people have this feeling about the Youngstown highschools. They must have just been superb to have people feel as they do.
- B: Of course, Rayen School had the same reputation all through this period. There was quite a group of well-trained teachers out there that were enlisted in both schools. There never seemed to be any financial problem as far as hiring the teachers. They all seemed to be willing to come in at the standard salary.
- M: I suppose that was very low by today's notion. You don't happen to remember what you were paid the first year at South High?
- B: Yes. At the time that I started, in the fall of 1919, there was really a shortage of teachers at that time. The man who had been teaching mechanical drawing left during the summertime and went to Cleveland to teach, so they were looking around for a mechanical drawing teacher.

I had finished my course at Carnegie, and I was down in Pennsylvania when I got a letter from my folks saying that the Youngstown Board of Education was looking for mechanical drawing teachers. In the meantime, I had rather tentatively agreed to stay at Carnegie and teach there, because after I had finished in June, they were having some classes for returned soldiers and I rather agreed to stay there and teach them math. I signed up to teach there at \$1600 a year. When I wrote in to the principal of the school--I didn't deal with the superintendent of schools, I dealt with the principal of South High--I told him that I planned to stay here and teach at Carnegie for \$1600 a year, but I would come to Youngstown at the same price. That is what they paid me, and I didn't realize that that was a little above what they were paying others. I was fortunate probably that there was a shortage there and they needed somebody to teach.

Within a year, then, there was a twenty-five percent increase in salary so that my salary in another year was \$2000 a year, which was much higher than the going salary for my experience at that time.

Later on, we had one superintendent of the schools who was reviewing the difference in salaries compared with years of experience, and he found that I was much higher in salary than my years of experience, so he wanted to hold me at that salary for a number of years, and I wouldn't sign a contract for next year. I finally went out.

M: By that time it was probably pretty obvious that he would be a loser if he let you do that.

You became principal fairly early on.

B: I taught mechanical drawing from 1919 until 1938, when I became assistant principal at South High.

M: Was almost everyone going to high school? Were people ever dropping out early?

B: I think nearly everyone started high school, but a lot of them dropped out along the way. I don't have the figures on that so I wouldn't want to hazard to guess on just what the dropout was.

M: But they were coming out of elementary schools with pretty good math backgrounds, is that right?

B: I would say it was a very good, general education. I think math would rate as high as . . . I enjoyed the math quite a bit so I'm not sure that I would be a good judge of others' abilities in math.

M: I mean the students.

B: Most of them took math when they went in the high school, and took algebra. Their background was such that they could handle it all right.

M: We've been so concerned in recent years because people come through the elementary schools and they can't manage. That's why I'm asking.

B: I don't remember anything of that type in the elementary education.

M: Most people went to high school. They were having the opportunity and they were taking, by and large, advantage of it at this time. Then you went on at South High for a good many years at this time. You wouldn't remember the principal's name when you first started?

B: Oh yes, it was Dyke. He was there for three years, then Walter Severence came in as principal. He was there my last year in high school. After Severence left, Mr. Reed came in. He was the one there when I came; he hired me. In my early days I was with all the principals, either as a student or a teacher, right straight through Bob Fleming's administration.

M: Probably nobody has a more complete knowledge of South High than you?

- B: I think the most interesting fact as far as my determination or my desire to go into administration was the inspiration that I got from what I consider the best principal we ever had in Youngstown, Mr. Ed Eaton. He was by far the superior administrator. I was fortunate enough while I was still teaching mechanical drawing, this was before I became assistant principal, to assist him more or less in some ways of scheduling and things like that. I enjoyed his way of working and finally became more adept at scheduling and helped out quite a lot in that. When Mr. Eaton left and a new principal came in, I was the one who had quite a lot of administrative experience in the school, so they moved me up to assistant principal.
- M: Could you describe the difference, the things that Mr. Eaton did that were a lot better than the other principals had done?
- B: He hired a good secretary, that's my wife. (Laughter)
- M: The secretary is a large share of the school, as I recall.
- B: He was a man that commanded respect. There was no doubt about that. He was very forceful, a very well-educated man, but he wasn't educated to the extent that he felt a degree was the important thing. He realized that all types of education counted. He was just as enthusiastic about commercial education, industrial arts, and all the various arts, as he was about college preparatory. All these were of a high standard. He felt that a person could excel in education in any field at all. If that was your event, he encouraged you along that line. I'll never forget the assemblies that he had because he was in command of the assembly. He was a very humorous man for one thing. He was a rather odd looking man; this was back in the days . . . Do you remember Ben Turpin?
- M: Slightly.
- B: Some of the kids called him Ben Turpin because of his peculiar shaped nose. He was an excellent administrator. You were sure of his decisions if they were right.
- M: These assemblies, what would they be like? Would there be an assembly every day?
- B: No, we didn't open up with an assembly. Those were scheduled at various times during the week. I think we had more general, good, out-of-town speakers that would come in, specialists in various lines that would give a talk on some subject.
- B: He was rather ahead of his time, wasn't he?

B: Yes.

M: That's the sort of thing they're thinking about now.

B: The assembly was more of an educational type of project. I think it broadened our education with something that we didn't get in the classroom. It wasn't just a fun thing or anything like that as we often think of an assembly now. If there is a football game going on we have an assembly, but we had more than that.

M: Were there other things that Mr. Eaton did? Was there something different in the way he handled discipline? With all this emphasis on getting kids interested, I suppose maybe he didn't have so much of a disciplinary problem.

B: He was a man of few words as far as discipline was concerned. It's hard to compare the schools then with now because we didn't think of anybody being bothered by discipline. The school was run so efficiently, and it was good teaching, that the problems we have nowadays we just didn't have them.

M: You were filling their needs.

B: Yes.

M: This matter of the history of South High, during the first ten years that you were at South, as you look at that all together, what things stand out that you learned or changed or anything like that?

B: As a teacher you mean?

M: Yes, and I suppose as assistant principal by this time.

B: I was teaching there from 1919 to 1938. That was about nineteen years as a teacher of mechanical drawing.

M: You taught mechanical drawing the entire twenty years?

B: Yes. I was not the only teacher, generally there were two of us that taught mechanical drawing later on after we enlarged the school. All these industrial arts courses were very good courses. A lot of us that took academic work and were planning to go on to college took many industrial arts subjects too, which doesn't happen too much anymore.

M: It's like you did it for the pleasure of doing it because you didn't need to.

B: We had very good classes in mechanical drawing, and later on I realized the effect of some of them. After I became

principal of Hillman Junior High, I remember distinctly one evening there was a meeting of foremen of various plants around. A foremen's association was meeting at Hillman, and I was down at the school that evening. I just dropped in to that meeting of the foremen, and I was surprised at the large number of men that I met that had been students of mine in mechanical drawing. The boys in high school at that time had a natural talent along that line, and they were increasing it by taking mechanical drawing, which helped them rise above the ordinary workman and become supervisors and foremen after they got in the industrial plants. It was that type of a student that you had which made teaching enjoyable. While I had them in class, I probably didn't realize their total potential either, but I knew they were good students. Of course, we had some that were not so good, like in any class. Most of them were in mechanical drawing because they wanted it, even though they had ability in math and science and everything else.

M: If you had realized that all along, you probably would have enjoyed it even more than you did. They had that meeting at Hillman Junior High?

B: Yes.

M: That continued throughout your whole year. Were there any changes that came out? There have been additions in mathematic courses that didn't used to be included since that time. Was the subject matter changing in any way due to advancing technology?

B: Subject matter, until I left South High in 1946, it remained largely the same. Of course, there were gradual changes in science and things of that type, but there wasn't the experimenting and changing and trying out new types of teaching. The way we had been doing it seemed to work all right. There didn't seem to be any need for changing or so-called improving the courses.

M: The subject matter itself wasn't changed?

B: No. Of course, you realize that the big change did not come until after the days of Sputnik.

M: During these years did you go to any further education, did you take any post-graduate work?

B: I took a number of courses with Western Reserve, and courses they were giving at Youngstown. There would probably be a course every year for teachers, mainly industrial arts teachers, and we would take those. I would probably take one course a year or something of that type. I did not go to summer school while I was

teaching.

M: Western Reserve professors would come down here for evening classes?

B: Yes, that's right.

M: Where would those be held?

B: Most of them were held at the administration building. It wasn't until after I got to Hillman that still more pressure was put on me to take more courses, and I took several courses over at Westminister, but I never did complete my master's degree.

M: I can't help but remember how beautiful the building was. When was that built?

B: It was built in 1940, or opened in 1940.

M: It was such a beautiful building.

B: After the building was built there was a pride in the building, and I was lucky enough to walk in to that type of an atmosphere.

There is not a definite fall through with some approved changes in teaching. I think I can explain this better by staying maybe to one subject, mathematics. When they started experimenting with math, and when they started so-called modern math, which doesn't mean anything to me, but there was a change in the emphasis of math, the various types of math that could be taught at various levels. They found that some things that we thought could only be taught at a high school level, some algebraic types of thinking could be taught to fourth and fifth graders just as well, and they would eat it up. I remember distinctly visiting some classes at Sheridan School and sitting in with some of these classes. I was amazed at the thinking of these youngsters when they were talking about powers and roots. Various types of mathematical works were changed around at various levels so that they could understand it.

What happens after a couple of years like that is the youngsters go back in a normal type of teaching with somebody else not related to what they had at all. After a while they go to high school and they fit into the same program of algebra, geometry, and so forth, straight through another. I'll admit that there might be slight changes in the content, but there hasn't been anything yet, of a definite change in the teaching of math from some elementary grade and following

- consecutively through high school. I think the youngsters have lost tremendously in their ability to get math, and their understanding of math, because for some reason or another it hasn't been possible to do this in the teaching. I wish that they would have never put in the term modern math because to me math is always the same. Math isn't always evident.
- M: They took a lot of math out, and then when they put it back it was modern.
- B: Some things that they have put in under the term of modern math, like sets of things, various bases that they have used, the ten base, the two base, the three base and the four base should have been reserved for a particular type of a student. As far as the general student is concerned, he has never been exposed to it.
- M: All it did was confuse the matter.
- B: Yes, it was confusing.
- M: How do you suppose this will ever be done? Is it depending on a textbook or a system of some sort? How can this ever happen?
- B: I'm not sure how it can be done. School systems have been dependent, of course, on textbook publishers, on a particular textbook that has been published along a certain line, and that has been adopted for certain schools and used. As far as I know, schools have never been in a position where they could dictate the type of text they wanted, and order this kind of a text to be published by a publishing company.
- M: You had to choose from what was published?
- B: That's right. Schools have not taken the lead in this; educators have not taken the lead, the textbook publishers have. I'll admit the textbook writers probably are educators. There is no doubt about that, and they probably are familiar with that particular subject they have been writing about, but not always is it the type of a text that a school should use. Of course, as you know, there has been a lot of controversy on what type of a text to adopt. We've never been unified on that in any school system. Frankly, I don't know how that thing is going to be licked.
- M: Maybe the time will come when teachers face this instead of some of the other things they are working on.
- B: If we go back in the early days of teaching, I'm thinking in my early days of teaching, there were occasional

improvements in texts, but not a big change which was disruptive. I think that's the point where it begins to get very bad. There had been certain systems that are brought out by scientific research, and various other companies like that who have some very worthwhile things in them in which students can progress along individual lines.

- M: In the classroom it's pretty hard to get the time, the schedule, so that you can take advantage of even those.
- B: It's very difficult for a teacher to handle all of the miscellaneous types of abilities, and various places where they are along the line to keep each youngster progressing on his individual capacity.
- M: This session is interesting to me, and I want to thank you very much for giving us this time. I'm sure it will be appreciated.
- B: I think there has been too much emphasis on the plain degree, without any recognition of what has been taught and how it is going to be applied. There had been no recognition at all, or very few exceptions now, the state one, where colleges have simply refused to recognize any experience that you had as being worth a nickel. You could teach for a dozen years and do an excellent job, but as far as any educational institution is concerned for higher education, it isn't worth a cent. It is not recognized as far as any credit is concerned or on any degree. There have been inroads lately on this, but not very general. Of course, a big start has been made by high school general education development tests, to get your diploma in high school, which I think is wonderful, but colleges need to recognize this in general. I think they have an obligation to evaluate experience in terms of credit for degrees. I'll give you one example which floors everybody that I talk to.

We had a guidance program at Hillman before there was any guidance program in the city at all. We were the only school that had anything like a guidance program. We used teachers on each level; this was group guidance in the seventh grade, eighth grade, and ninth grade where I picked out one teacher to handle the group guidance. These were changed once in a while when some teacher didn't care to continue with it. Jody DeGenarro became guidance counselor; guidance wasn't a counselor particularly, that was only a small part of the work. He was sort of guidance director on the ninth grade level. He moved out to California and went into social studies, but then wanted to get into guidance there. They told him that he would have to take some further work in

college on guidance. He called me one night from California, and asked if I would write a letter for him telling them the type of work he did at Hillman, the type of guidance program they had in general, and to send that to the college. As a result he got fifteen hours college credit for the work that he did at Hillman.

M: Now that made some sense, didn't it?

B: This was the kind of guidance they were looking for in California; it wasn't worth a nickel in Youngstown. Out there they were striving for it. This is the thing that I think is entirely wrong. I think colleges have to recognize the type of work that is done in the schools, which in turn will improve the teaching, if teachers know that the results of their teaching are going to be recognized this way.

M: It was definitely a help to the people in California. If they had been here they would have probably forced him to take all those credit hours.

B: I think this is one reason I never got a master's degree. There were certain things that I needed, courses in statistics and things like that that I took at Westminster. I needed them and I took them and I used them. Other things were a repetition of what I had been doing for years.

M: So you didn't bother with it?

B: I didn't bother with it. It wasn't worth it.

M: There is your idea.

END OF INTERVIEW